

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE –

It's time to close Youth Courts

It is imperative that Children's Courts are closed courts. Young people presenting before the Children's Courts are some of the most vulnerable children in our community – many have been exposed to trauma, have experienced long term disadvantage and experience the ongoing stigmatization related to involvement in the Youth Justice system that impacts them later in life.

Having them face stigmatization and labelling through being identified and their stories told in Court can seriously impact their future chances in life.

Education and employment are two of the most protective factors that can help with desistance from offending; the current use of open Courts in the Northern Territory can impact a child's access to these key pathways away from crime due to public identification and shame.

The Royal Commission heard the same message from a range of people and stakeholders, including young people themselves, on the impact that public identification and the use of Open Courts had on the rehabilitation prospects of young people due to stigmatisation and labelling.

"It is important that children appearing before the Courts are held to account and are supported to learn about the impacts of their offending on others. This can be achieved by providing them with opportunities to repair harm and by recognizing that many young people appearing before the Courts will grow out of offending as they mature" says Jesuit Social Services Northern Territory General Manager, John Adams.

Changing legislation to ensure all Youth Courts in the Northern Territory are closed is one of the ways we can support young people to get back on track and recognizes that the vast majority of children are likely to grow out of offending. "This will have positive outcomes for everyone in our community – not just children in trouble, but every single Territorian," says Jesuit Social Services' CEO, Julie Edwards.

"We support this amendment to the Youth Justice Act as it will ensure children in the Territory are given better access to rehabilitation which will result in fewer people harmed by crime in our community".

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